

DERVISH'S TOMBSTONE IN THE FORM OF A STONE HORSE. KARABAKH

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Tradition of erecting tombstones in the form of a stone horse or ram in Azerbaijan dates back to the early Middle Ages. Totemic beliefs, which survived despite the dominance of the Islamic religion at that time, were manifested in old folk rituals. Many of these old rites were canonized in the era when the territory of the historical residence of the ancestors of modern Azerbaijanis (territories south of the Aras River and the South Caucasus) was part of the feudal state of "Kara Koyunlu" ("Those having Black Rams") and later, the Confederation of "Ak Koyunlu" ("Those having White Horses") of the 15th century. One of these old rituals was the tradition of erecting a monument in the form of a stone saddled horse over the grave of a deceased man. The earliest gravestones in the form of stone bagels and horses date back to this time. Tradition of constructing such tombstones was preserved among some nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes that lived in these territories until the 19th century.

Tombstone of a dervish in the form of a stone horse from the Karabakh village of Mishni (Kelbajar District) reflects the ancient symbolism of the horse, preserved in the myths and archaic beliefs of the Azerbaijanis. Ethnically, Azerbaijanis are representatives of the Oghuz and Kipchak tribes, which were once part of the conglomerate of the Turkic super-ethnos.

The origins of the horse's grave symbolism come from the tribal beliefs and traditions of these tribes. Horse was the man's friend, companion and helper throughout his life. At the same time, the belief persisted that a man's faithful friend, the horse, would mystically transport him to the afterlife after his death and continue to serve him there. Stone horse on the warrior's grave symbolized the connection between the physical, present, and the otherworldly world of spirits. It is interesting that none of the surviving tombstones in the form of a horse is depicted without a saddle. All of them are created fully equipped, ready to transport their owner to the other world.

Horse-shaped tombstones were erected exclusively on male graves. In the Turkic tradition, a woman had no right to touch two things belonging to a man: his weapon and his horse. It was believed that they lost their power from a woman's touch. Many tombstones in the shape of a horse have been discovered, the inscriptions or images on which "speak" to the fact that a man who was not at all of a military class was buried in the grave. One of these is a tombstone in the shape of a horse, which once stood in the cemetery of the village of Mishni, Kelbajar region of Azerbaijan. The structural and stylistic features of the tombstone allow it to be dated to the middle or second half of the 18th century. This dating is confirmed by relatively well-preserved similar tombstones in the form of a horse, containing written information about the buried person and the date of burial.

It must be said that horse-shaped tombstones discovered in various regions of Azerbaijan indicate that their artistic and stylistic features vary depending on the geographical and cultural area, as well as local traditions and the time of the monument's creation. For this reason, the tombstones of horses in Shirvan differ stylistically from similar monuments in Karabakh, Nakhchivan, Kazakh or Mughan. Each of these regions has its own artistic and

stylistic features of horse-shaped tombstones, and their local style serves as an objective marker that helps to accurately determine the geographic, cultural, and historical origin of the tombstone.

Horse-shaped tombstones were certainly unorthodox grave monuments in an area where Islam had already become the dominant religion. Tradition of erecting such tombstones contradicted the dogmas of Islam. This tradition was characteristic of the tribal society of mountainous and outlying regions, where the strict demands of Islam were not yet strong. Old folk traditions and rituals in such settlements often adapted quite tolerantly to new Muslim dogmas, rituals, and canons. Tombstones in such settlements remote from large cities adapted to the requirements of the new religion by incorporating Arabic inscriptions and Islamic symbols on the tombstone. Such symbolic images, testifying to the Islamic faith of the buried person, included images of shoes, prayer beads, a crescent moon, a comb, etc. The most common symbol among them is the image of the buried person's shoes on the tombstone. This symbol indicated that the deceased was a good Muslim who regularly attended the mosque for prayer, where he always took off his shoes.

Arabic script inscriptions were usually placed on the right side of the horse figure. On the opposite side, there were sometimes images of scenes from the life of the deceased. The presence of images, as a rule, indicated the high social status or material well-being of the deceased. Such images, along with written text, provided figurative information about the buried person. The horse's face was traditionally directed to the East, towards Mecca, the holy city for Muslims.

Visual information about the deceased is also contained in a tombstone in the form of a horse from the cemetery of the village of Mishni in the Kelbajar region of Karabakh. Parts of the horse figure were broken off by Armenian separatists. Despite this, based on identical tombstones, it was possible to reconstruct the damaged tombstone of the dervish. Tombstone, in the form of a horse, depicts a bearded dervish holding in his hand a ritual axe, "tabarzin", which was an obligatory attribute of a wandering dervish. Ritual bronze axe was not a weapon in the literal sense. The axe was a symbol of the dervish's voluntary cutting off of all material and carnal desires.

As is known, the image of a person was not welcomed in orthodox Islam. But this ban did not remain in effect for a long time in the outlying and mountain villages, where the foundations of Islam were quite weak, and the old pagan traditions were still very strong.

Depicting a scene from the life of the buried person on a tombstone was an old tradition. Later, as a result of the expansion of Islam's influence into remote and inaccessible mountain settlements, this tradition gradually transformed, and instead of depicting a person, tombstones began to depict only his tools, weapons, or objects that the deceased used during his life. These iconographic changes began to appear in tombstones after the collapse of the medieval feudal states of Azerbaijan in the mid-18th century. Consequently, the tombstone of a dervish holding a ritual axe, "tabarzin," can be clearly dated to the middle and second half of the 18th century.

The artistic and stylistic features of the horse figure on the tombstone are also identical to those of synchronous tombstones with preserved dates and discovered in various regions of Azerbaijan, such as Karabakh, Zangezur, Kazakh, Ganja, Shamkir, and Tovuz.

Sources

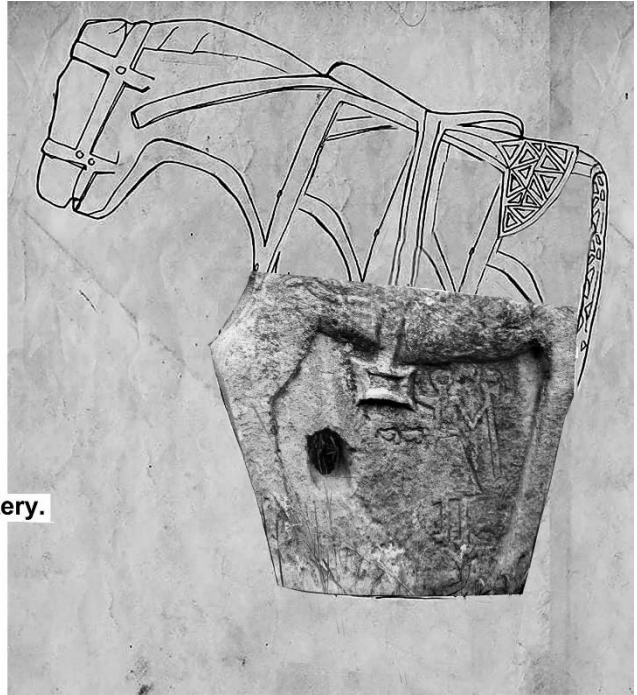
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Tombstone in the shape of a horse. Karabakh, Kelbajar region, Mishni village. 18th century



**A dervish's tombstone in the shape of a horse.
Azerbaijan, Kelbajar region, Mishni village cemetery.
19th century. Photo taken in the early 1980s,
before the Armenian occupation of the region.
The tombstone's reconstruction was performed by
Telman Ibrahimov.**



Reconstruction of a tombstone



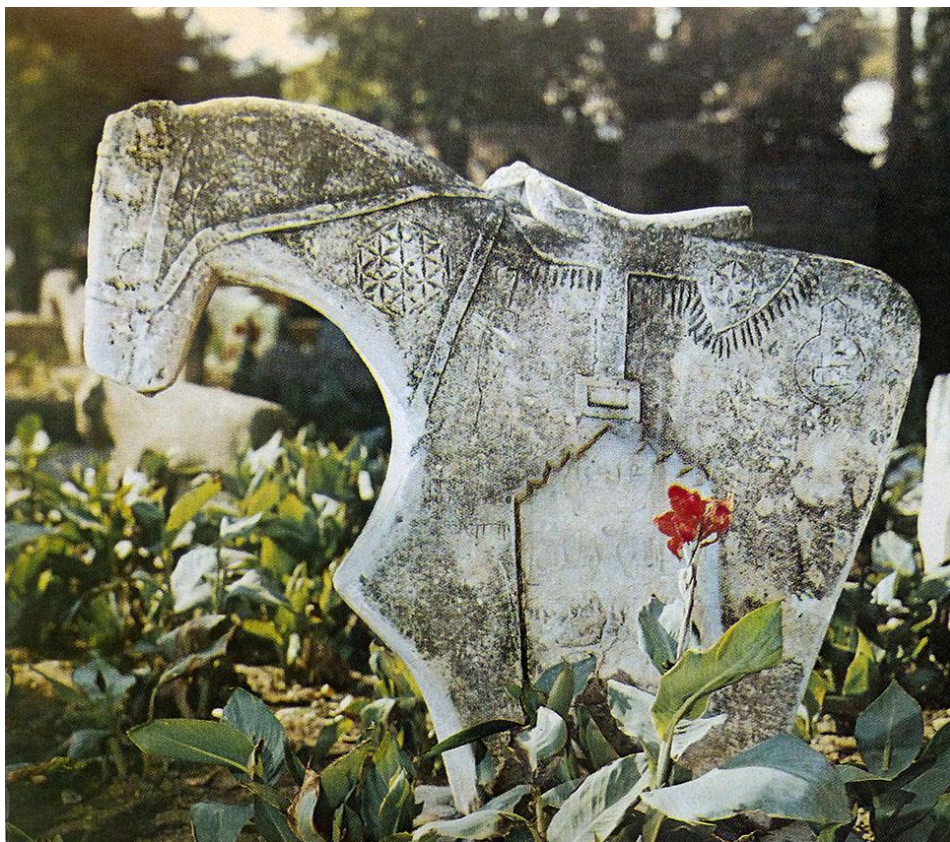
Tombstone in the shape of a horse. Ganja. 18th century



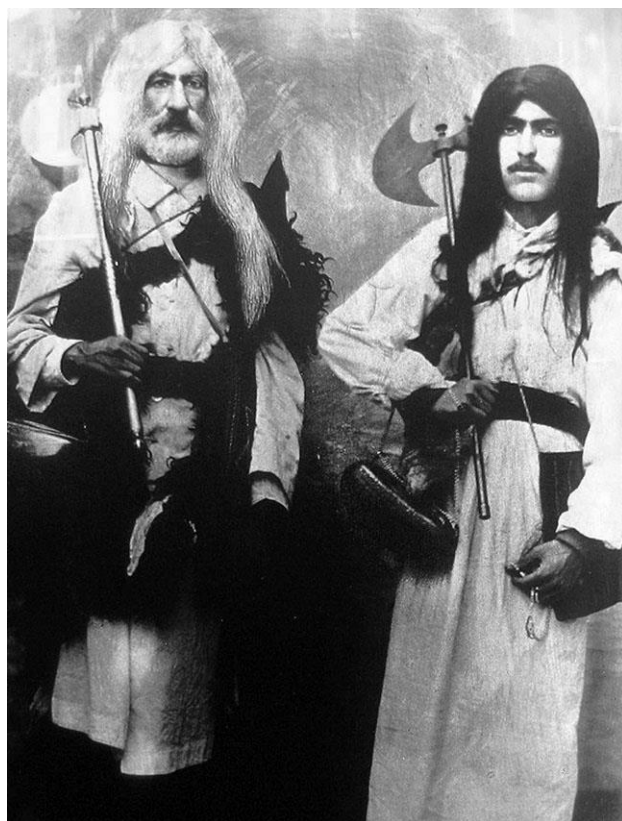
Tombstone in the shape of a horse. Goranboy district, 18th century



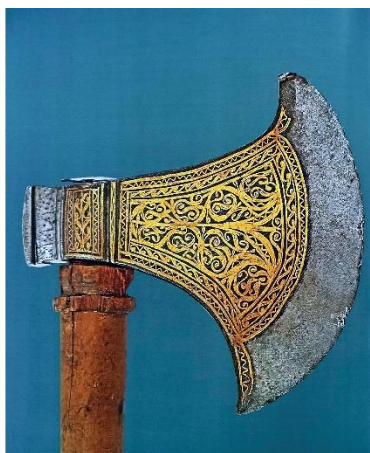
Tombstone in the shape of a horse. Ganja. 18th century



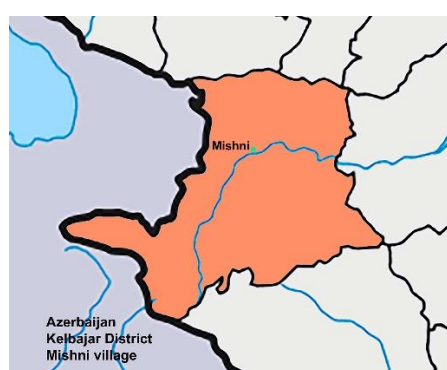
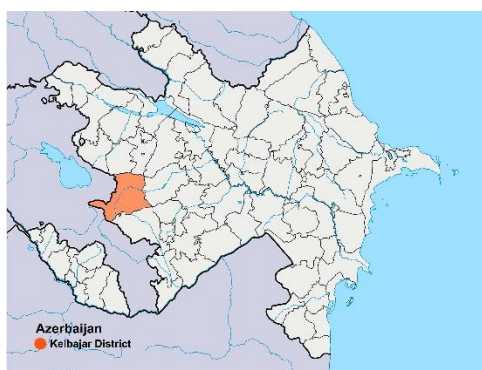
Tombstone in the shape of a horse. Ganja, 1799



Dervishes. 19th century



Ritual axes of Dervish (Tabarzin). 18th century



Map. Mishni village. Karabakh, Kelbajar, Azerbaijan